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The Belgian triangle

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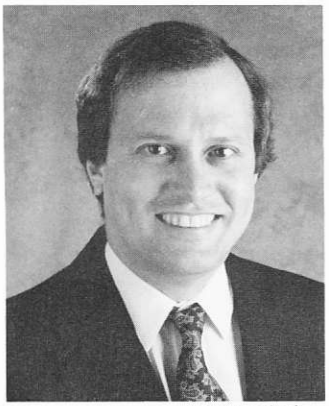
EDITORIAL

High stakes



Jerome Clark

Hoaxes have always loomed large in UFO history, though not because there have been, relatively speaking, a lot of them (this is probably the one issue on which ufologists and Blue Book fully agreed) but because hoaxers make what might be called high-stakes claims. A high-stakes claim is one in which something huge is promised: at the minimum significant evidence of UFO reality, at the other extreme the answer to the UFO mystery. Sometimes a high-stakes claim encompasses both of these. By their nature such claims are going to get a lot of attention, and a hoax that doesn't get attention is a hoax not worth the doing.

Not all high-stakes claims are hoaxes, of course. The Roswell incident is no hoax, and neither are many others which seem to point to the physical, and unearthly, nature of the UFO phenomenon. But our concern here is with claims that are certainly not true, probably not true, and possibly not true. We have had, let us face it, more than a few of them in recent years.

There is an overwhelming consensus that George Adamski and other prominent contactees of the 1950s were lying about their experiences with space people and manufacturing phony supporting evidence, usually in the form of close-up pictures of alleged spacecraft. Virtually no rational ufologist argues that the stories told in Frank Scully's *Behind the Flying Saucers*, about UFO crashes in Aztec, New Mexico, and other Southwestern sites, are true, or that Alex Hamilton really saw UFO creatures steal a calf from his Kansas ranch in 1897, or that a Martian lies in an unmarked Aurora, Texas, grave. These are among ufology's most notable, and undisputed, hoaxes, though each for a period of time had its supporters (occasionally even *after* the disconfirming facts came to light). And of course no one who expects to be taken seriously considers the tales told in checkout-counter tabloids to represent responsible reporting of real events.

For years hoaxes have been relegated to a kind of UFO ghetto, and understandably so. After the collapse of the 1950s contactee movement (of which Switzerland's Billy Meier's later adventures were but a distant echo), hoaxes became something of a low-level annoyance, even an object of amusement. It seems funny, for example, that anybody ever believed the transparently contrived Cergy-Pontoise abduction/contact tale, and downright hysterical that one pop-eyed French saucer fan rushed into print with a book's worth of unqualified endorsement. It is hilarious that an incident that did not happen, the Aztec crash, has now been the subject of two books which pretend it did. But none of any of this was important to anybody but those directly involved, and sober ufologists made a point of giving these individuals a wide berth.

All this changed in the 1980s when the MJ-12 document and the Gulf Breeze, Florida, photographs thrust themselves to the center of the stage. Both were immediately suspect for various reasons; yet being merely suspect and being certainly bogus are not the same state of being, and in each case supporters, many not ordinarily known to be gullible, were able to make, for a time anyway, what looked like a credible positive case—credible enough, at any rate, to keep the issues alive and the focus of furious controversy for a time.

Gulf Breeze turned out to be—I say this realizing there are still some out there, including friends whom I continue to hold in high regard, who will disagree—an ordinary hoax with some extraordinary features. These unusual features worked to the hoaxer's advantage, giving his story and photographs an aura of authenticity by association. To all appearances real UFO sightings, witnessed by eminently respectable citizens, were occurring even as the hoax was playing. The unwillingness of the Gulf Breeze photographer's critics to acknowledge as much did their own case no good, nor did the vitriolic polemics indulged in by some fanatics in that camp. Yet on the important issues the critics were right, and the controversy now appears to have been resolved in the negative.

Gulf Breeze was, of course, a classic high-stakes claim. Unlike Adamski, the hoaxer did not purport to have the answer to the mystery, no doubt because his thematic model was not the contact story but the now-more-familiar abduction experience, with its notoriously uncommunicative UFO beings. But he did present what would have been, if authentic, *the* proof of UFO reality, in the form of remarkable photographs; in that sense at least he paralleled Adamski. One investigator told me early on that he thought the Gulf Breeze photographs had the potential to be ufology's breakthrough case, the equivalent of the episode, nearly two centuries ago, that forever ended scientists' resistance to the existence of meteorites. Seen that way, the photographs have a dangerously seductive appeal. In the same way research-

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The Belgian sightings

by Auguste Meessen

■■ **Auguste Meessen is professor of physics at the Catholic University of Louvain. This article, which first appeared in the November 1990 issue of *Inforespace*, is reprinted by permission. It was translated by Andrea Donderi, Mark Rodeghier, and W. D. Milner.**

The sightings that occurred in Belgium between November 1989 and June 1990 have given us an impressive body of new data. We have even been able to study in detail material from both military and civilian ground radar screens. Moreover, an in-depth examination of on-board radar data from one of the F-16s sent up by the Belgian Air Force during the night of March 30-31, 1990, is currently under way. As far as I know, this is the first such opportunity in the world, but much remains to be done. I shall therefore only give an overview of this research. I shall outline what we are doing and briefly describe our methods.

I shall also include some remarks on the unwarranted generalizations that are still too frequently encountered (from skeptics) and on the reactions of eyewitnesses in the current socio-psychological climate in European ufology. Finally, I shall present a few reports of sightings made in Belgium and abroad. One case in particular, the enormous lozenge-shaped object that flew over the outskirts of the town of Eupen on December 1, 1989, is representative of the quality and importance of the new information. In assessing reports it is important to be aware of what has been happening in other countries, so I shall include a few foreign cases that suggest the wave of sightings may not be over.

Ground investigations

At the beginning of December 1989 I joined the SOBEPS (Société Belge d'Etude des Phénomènes Spatiaux) investigation. It was vital to familiarize myself personally with the number and quality of the eyewitness reports. I concentrated almost exclusively on the Eupen region, of which I am a native. I hoped that my fluency in German and my profession as a physicist would help loosen people's tongues. I have noted that many eyewitnesses, and particularly the most reliable ones with important social responsibilities, are reluctant to discuss what they have seen because of irrational socio-psychological pressures.

The evening of November 29, 1989, was decisive, because two Eupen police officers had the courage to describe on television the UFO they had painstakingly observed. There were several other sightings that same day. I shall be compiling a list of them in the book that SOBEPS is planning to publish. I have discovered a series of eyewitness accounts that form a coherent sequence in time and space that day. The sightings made by Mr. J (more on which later) provide one example of what can be learned from these witnesses. In my opinion, data of these kinds, when taken together with the whole body of sightings worldwide, pose a challenge to the scientific community and to every thoughtful person.

Journalists have had an especially important role. Some of them have performed their work conscientiously, but others were simply seeking sensational stories. Yet more felt obliged to lead a personal crusade against the gathering of eyewitness reports. I will cite just one example whose immediate effects I observed.

A few days after December 18, 1989, a gendarme in the Eupen area refused to tell me what he had seen, probably because on that date a local daily paper had published an article which asserted that the "most plausible explanation" for UFO sightings was that the U. S. Air Force was secretly testing F-117A planes over Belgium. This article was preceded by the impressive headline "Explanation from Washington," and the subheading referred to a "hysteria" of UFO sightings. I was sent a copy of this paper the same day and immediately inquired into the matter, since these stories also form an aspect of the UFO phenomenon.

It turned out that the "explanation" was only speculation, put forward by the Flemish paper *Het Laatste Nieuws*. I phoned the journalist who wrote the article that triggered off a rumor which is still causing much ink to be spilt. He explained that he had just read an article on the F-117A and wished to pass on such information to his readers. To make his article more interesting, he had suggested (gratuitously, with no reference to the actual sightings) that there might be a possible connection with recent sightings in Belgium. In the meantime, I had learned from Lt. Col. De Brouwer, Chief of Operations of the Belgian Air Force, that the Air Force had sought information from the American Embassy to help them explain the reports. This should not have been necessary if the sightings were caused by secret exercises, as De Brouwer routinely would have been informed of any such

overflights. Instead, he took the trouble to secure accurate information about what the many Belgian eyewitnesses had really seen.

Learning that an official American disclaimer was to be published, I telephoned the Eupen journalist to tell him the news and to ask him to publish a correction as soon as possible. When I asked him why he had spoken of "an explanation from Washington" and characterized the eyewitness accounts of local people as "hysterical," he responded, "I am against all that." I appreciate his candor, but that does not square with the regard for objectivity one expects of journalists. Such attitudes constitute disinformation and serve to dissuade eyewitnesses; they make the search for truth more difficult.

The search for more objective information

Having convinced myself of the reality and importance of the wave of UFO sightings in our country, I concluded that it would have been scientifically irresponsible to ignore this wave without trying to find out what had turned up on our country's radar screens. I did not know how to gain access to the data, but I felt that reason would eventually prevail. Since early December 1989 I had been in contact with Lt. Col. De Brouwer at the Headquarters of the Belgian Air Force, requesting that any radar documentation be preserved for a thorough scientific study. Shortly afterwards I sent a similar written request to Guy Coëme, Minister of National Defense.

I also met the head of the air traffic control at Zaventem, the Brussels airport. I learned that he and his associates preserve recordings of radar data for several weeks on magnetic tape in the event of any inquiries relating to air safety. I therefore addressed a written request to Mr. Vandenbroucke, the General Manager of the Airlines Administration, for permission to videotape certain excerpts. These would be restricted to sequences selected on the basis of the number of fairly close-range and reliable UFO sightings. The goal was to verify whether there had been any suspicious radar traces before or after the sighting times, given that the UFOs were doubtless below the radar coverage at the time of very low-altitude sightings.

Although the response was delayed, a call to Vandenbroucke brought immediate cooperation. I convey my warm thanks to him and to the Chief Engineer and the technical radar personnel of our national airport for their effective support, which proved useful. In consequence I have been able to film and analyze more than 180 hours of data from the Bertem radar installation, which serves Zaventem airport. In brief, two surprising and significant discoveries emerged from this material. I shall describe them later. One of these discoveries concerned the fact that echoes of unidentified origin often moved along linear trajectories of limited length. This perplexed me. I continued to collect as many data as possible, refusing to adopt any particular hypothesis. Furthermore, it was vital to analyze these data quickly so that I could assimilate their essential characteristics and determine what was worth studying more closely. In fact, I was involved in a race against time, since the magnetic tapes were retained only for a few weeks. Any potentially important material that I failed to save would be lost forever.

I also hoped to gain access to the military radar documentation, although I knew this would be more difficult. An increasingly close and productive collaboration had developed with Lt. Col. De Brouwer and with Lt. Col. Billen, Chief of the Glons radar installation. They shared my profound conviction that an in-depth study was required, both to understand better the UFO phenomenon and to elucidate the mysterious phenomenon that I had discovered, probably of atmospheric origin.

During this stage of the investigation an important event occurred. I knew that the Belgian Air Force planned to scramble F-16 fighters in cases where UFO sightings were reported by reliable eyewitnesses with additional confirmation by other evidence. These conditions seemed to have been met during the night of March 30-31, 1990. Although I was notified at an early stage, I had to wait for the Air Force's preliminary evaluation of the data before learning anything more.

For my part, I kept Lt. Col. De Brouwer informed about my research on the data from the Bertem radar. He saw the benefit of checking these data against those from the military radar at Semmerzake. I was accordingly authorized to go there and obtain extracts from these tapes. The information regarding the events of the night of March 30-31 remained inaccessible since an Air Force investigation was underway, but we were making progress all the same. The Semmerzake data were more accurate and detailed than those I already had.

Consequently, I was able to compare the data from the Semmerzake military radar with those from the Bertem civil radar, whose echoes are instantaneously transmitted to Semmerzake. They are subject to even less filtering than on the air controllers' screens at Zaventem airport. I could thus establish the coordinates and other characteristics of each individual echo. The analysis was laborious but made it possible to decisively confirm the preliminary conclusions drawn from the video films taken at Zaventem.

After the release of the Air Force report in the summer of 1990, there were irrational reactions on the part of some French media. Lt. Col. De Brouwer responded by supplying more information, hoping to demonstrate that the situation was more complex and better documented than many supposed, and that it merited further analysis. He resolutely followed an open-minded policy. Some journalists had labeled the military "The Great Mute"; by contrast, Lt. Col. De Brouwer maintained that "we have nothing to hide in this matter." I can attest to his deep honesty and courage.

After talking with a reporter from *Paris Match* (July 5, 1990, issue), De Brouwer also allowed some members of SOBEPS to see an extract from the video film of the on-board radar from one of the F-16s. The series of photos we were authorized to take enabled me to make a preliminary assessment, and I realized then the extremely strange nature of these data. Having made considerable headway in interpreting some of the initial radar data, I could see that the same explanation would not work for these astonishing observations.

In order to go further, I needed the express permission of the Minister of National Defense. Since my written request had met with no response, probably because of bureaucratic inertia, I decided to telephone the Minister, Guy Coëme. His response was almost immediate: "I believe in openness." This was, I think, a historic attitude. In any event, it was an exemplary action, from which other countries will soon, I hope, draw inspiration.

After this everything went like clockwork, albeit one whose hands moved slowly. For instance, I received the data from the Glons radar for the main events of March 30-31, 1990, on November 2, fully seven months later. The appropriate permissions had all been granted, but other military missions (in particular, the Gulf crisis and the intervention in Rwanda) took precedence compared to UFO investigations. Still, there can be a real advantage to letting ideas settle for a while. At present thorough studies are being undertaken in complete collaboration with an officer-engineer of the Belgian Air Force. I do not wish to name him so as to prevent him from being besieged with inquiries. The conclusions of our study will be published but only when this can be done in a responsible manner.

The fundamental results

Almost continually, radar screens show sporadic echoes not correlated with aircraft. Radar operators call these echoes "angels," as if they were pure spirits. For them the echoes constitute annoying "noise" and are ignored as much as possible. A priori they could just as easily be UFOs as natural phenomena. They appear only occasionally, all over the screen. An air traffic controller cannot afford to waste time and attention on them. When I systematically recorded the positions in which these "angels" appeared, however, I noted that they often moved in practically straight lines. I have labeled this the "flying angels effect."

The average speed of this movement is low relative to that of aircraft (about 50 km/h). There are random fluctuations, but the mean speed is well-defined. The lines of motion are of limited length, and their direction of motion is not correlated with the wind. Furthermore, they can appear (perhaps even more often) when the sky is clear. The Semmerzake radar could locate the physical position of the radar returns. As the data accumulated, it became evident that this phenomenon could not involve UFOs. It had to be an atmospheric problem, albeit a fairly special one, since the radar operators whom I consulted had not noticed this effect. A comprehensive survey of the literature indicated that this phenomenon had not been described either. I have finally discovered an explanation based on known physical principles and on some independent data. It will be described elsewhere when I have had time to verify it further. The "flying angels effect" is undoubtedly of atmospheric origin.

My second main finding was that I found no reliable traces associated with eyewitness accounts of UFO sightings, even when I examined the traces over a wide range of times and places. I knew, however, that there had been previous cases of radar detection of UFOs. The evidence in these cases seems to be acceptable (and cannot be explained by the "flying angels" phenomenon). Given the lack of radar confirmation in Belgium, it would be easy to put forward one or the other of these two simplistic hypotheses: either the witnesses saw nothing of a material nature, or F-117 Stealth aircraft were involved. But neither one nor the other hypothesis takes into account the whole range of what was observed. The UFOs sighted in Belgium were usually described as platforms, either stationary or moving horizontally. This is sufficient to explain the low probability of detection by ground radars. The radar beams would be reflected back as if by a horizontal mirror. The same technique is used for the F-117A Stealth plane.

On several occasions the UFOs had been described as having a vertical edge and a dome on top. Seen laterally or from above, as from an aircraft, radar detection might therefore be easier. So an F-16 might possibly detect a UFO of this kind, if the surfaces were not made of radar-absorbent material. This presents new questions, since if UFOs are extraterrestrial, why are their shapes now different from previously reported objects? Could they have adapted their craft's shape in order to evade our detection systems, or is it just a coincidence, resulting from the fact that this batch of visitors come from somewhere else?

As for the data from the F-16 on-board radar, which operates differently from ground radars and can record different kinds of data, I can only say, for the time being, that they are astonishing. In particular, there are abrupt changes in speed as well as other strange features. This calls for a technical, far-reaching, and careful study. We have made a start. I don't know what conclusion we will reach, nor when we shall reach it.

The views of *Science & Vie*

With a few rare exceptions, the French media's coverage of the Belgian UFO sightings has not been distinguished by its objectivity. Some writers did not hesitate to quite openly make fun of the "little Belgians" and their "tales," but we shall see who laughs last. What surprised me most was the fact that the magazine *Science & Vie* (*Science &*

Life) had launched a sort of anti-UFO crusade. I have often admired this magazine's articles of scientific popularization. It has, in the past, taken a clear responsibility for public's scientific education. It is all the more deplorable, then, that in this area it traffics in irrational, unscientific polemics. The only advantage may be to document the fact for future generations that at the end of the 20th Century people reacted in this fashion, in spite of the lessons that they could have drawn from the history of science.

When there is a conflict between a new kind of fact and the established conceptual framework, people tend to hang on to preconceived ideas. What does not fit in with the theories that are regarded as unshakable is filtered out or repressed. People refuse to face reality. So far as UFOs are concerned, the method consists of selecting some facts that can be explained, it is thought, in a conventional manner. Then it is believed that this result can be extrapolated, without any effort's being made to examine the rest of the data. This leads to what can be termed unwarranted generalizations.

In its January 1990 issue (No. 868), *Science & Vie* showed no hesitation in discrediting all the Belgian eyewitnesses on the basis of *just one photograph*. This photo, taken near Eupen, showed a big luminous dot. The photographers submitted the photo to SOBEPS, along with several others from the same event. Even though the photo had little to do with the many eyewitness sightings, it could have been given an detailed analysis. Instead, the editorial team of *Science & Vie* preferred an unsupported interpretation, strongly suggesting that all eyewitness reports smacked of "poetry" or optical illusions.

In the June issue (No. 873) the magazine provided information about the F-117A Stealth aircraft. This sort of information had just been made public by the U.S. Air Force. The title of the article—"The UFO: This Is It," showing an example of an F-117A—speaks volumes about the magazine's commercial rather than scientific intentions. Again, it insinuated that all the witnesses must have been mistaken, like the Belgian Air Force. The author of this article and everyone involved clearly felt no need to conduct on-the-spot inquiries in order to obtain more information and acquire an objective view of the facts.

The October issue (No. 877) of *Science & Vie* announced on its first page that it was "on the track of the Belgian UFOs." In fact, the author was concerned only with the events of March 30-31, 1990, and the involvement of the Belgian Air Force. Apparently he felt that this constituted the core of the matter, and that by debunking it he could dispose of the whole story. He considered only the initial reports, which contained raw, unanalyzed information. The author of the article is intelligent and able, but his method resembled more that of a lawyer defending a specific brief than that of a scientist representing the quest for truth. After the press conference given by Lt. Col. De Brouwer, the F-117A hypothesis had been discredited, but that need be no obstacle; plenty of other hypotheses can be constructed.

Why not suggest the existence of another secret plane, with all the capabilities necessary to explain the apparent paradoxes? Perhaps the U.S. Air Force was testing this secret plane over Belgium *without notifying the Belgian Air Force* —a friendly nation which uses American F-16s. Does this seem practical or likely? Consider that testing new planes inevitably involves the risk of an accident or crash, in which case the Belgian authorities would have to be notified to help protect essential secrets.

Why not suggest that the Belgian police were so unaccustomed to seeing stars that they got all confused at the sight of some? Or, above all, that there is no supporting evidence to back up any of the Belgian sightings, even though there were more than a thousand reports and they went on for more than six months?

Following this line of reasoning, everything is for the best in the "best of all possible worlds" in which profounder questions must not be asked.

On the contrary, it seems to me that it's always a good idea to be guided by the facts, especially when they are unexpected. What thousands of witnesses have seen for many years throughout the world deserves serious study. I am not advocating a specific hypothesis, only asking people to open their eyes.

The witnesses' reactions

Witnesses' reactions are diverse, as might be expected. In most cases people simply relate what has happened in a factual manner, being explicit about what they have been able to observe and confessing their perplexity. What now seems to me to be new and significant is that many witnesses are annoyed at not being taken seriously.

As regards the socio-psychological hypothesis, which explains UFO sightings by the desire to make contact with extraterrestrial beings, I do not believe that this is compatible with my experiences interviewing a fairly sizeable number of witnesses. Naturally there are pathological and even psychiatric cases, but let us again refrain from unwarranted extrapolations. I have noted, like other investigators, that at the outset of their strange sightings, witnesses practically always try to find a conventional explanation; as they take in more details, though, the conventional explanation no longer suffices. This reaction violates a basic assumption of some "socio-psychologists."

It is true that witnesses are quicker to think of a UFO after the media have told them other people have seen them, and they report sightings more readily once they know that organizations are studying UFO reports seriously. Some people have intentionally scanned the skies, but they have not necessarily seen anything.

It is absolutely normal for someone to filter and analyze sensory data on the basis of preexisting conceptual

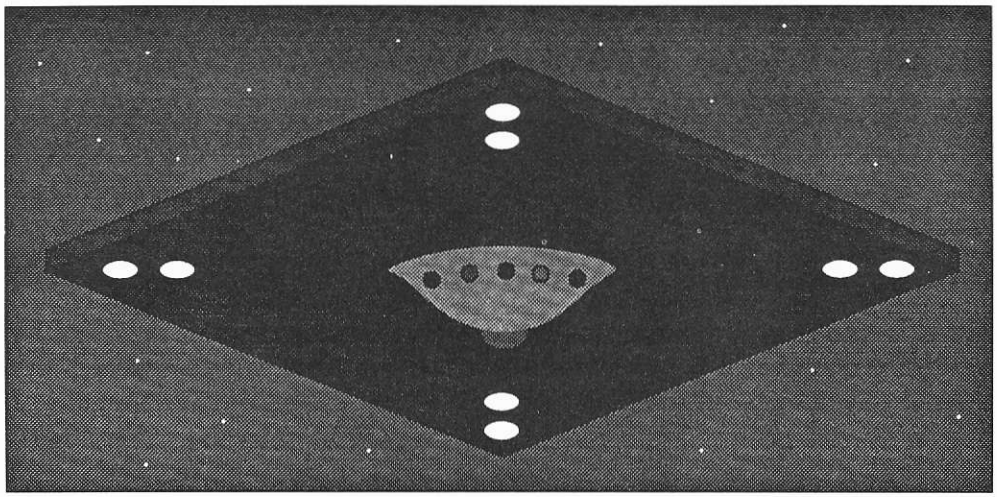

Figure 1

models. What happens when there is a discrepancy? Some witnesses describe extraordinary events, repeating that they do not believe in UFOs. Perhaps they're trying to reassure themselves, perhaps they're afraid of seeming insane to the interviewers. On several occasions I have met witnesses who, although accepting the ET hypothesis, are visibly upset about these "intruders." Humanity could be defenseless and dependent on the goodwill of an unknown, technologically very superior, external power. I have met only one witness who told me in a confiding manner: "I should very much like to meet them." He said this spontaneously when I asked him what he thought of his sighting.

Reality is far less clear-cut than the supporters of the socio-psychological hypothesis imagine. The collective unconscious does not, for the most part, desire contact with extraterrestrials. We cannot assume we are dealing with religious beliefs, either. On the contrary, it is clear that a fairly sizable number of witnesses have no wish at all to communicate what they have observed. We know this because of the cases discovered entirely by chance and long after the fact. The 1989-90 Belgian wave encouraged a number of people to tell investigators about much earlier sightings. One man wrote to me describing a sighting made during the mobilization before World War II, when he was all alone on a road. He was so excited and frightened by the experience that he told no one except his wife. A member of an embassy told me of a sighting made aboard an aircraft with many other people. Afterwards, he asked me not to say anything about it to the other embassy personnel, saying, "They'll think me crazy."

The fact that the UFOs reported here are generally of a different type from the traditional "saucer" is also significant. If the witnesses had invented their accounts, they would probably have tried to make them seem more believable by corresponding to the standard model. This is not what happened. One new feature is that the Belgian UFOs travel over cities at very low altitudes. Moreover, there were no marked electromagnetic disturbances, as has often been reported in the past. These differences are worth considering with a view to understanding the technology rather than simply assuming that the witnesses can't relate accurately what they've seen.

An enormous lozenge at Eupen

Mr. J observed the same type of object twice. I heard of his sightings indirectly, and when I telephoned him, he firmly insisted on anonymity: "I don't want anyone to tell my children that their father was out of his mind." He told me that the machine he had seen was "incredibly large." This assessment was based on his first sighting, which was on December 1, 1989. I visited him on January 15, five days after his second sighting. He is an amateur photographer and described the UFO with the precision of a careful observer.

On the evening of December 1, he was going to take his wife to a private exhibition organized by his club. At around 5 p.m. two of his five children, aged 14 and 15, had already told him about "strange planes in the sky." After school they had been playing on the street with a Moroccan boy who lived in one of the neighboring houses. It was already growing dark and one of the children said, "They're UFOs," using the German word for UFO. Mr. J had replied, "Of course not, they must be planes."

At 6:50 Mr. J was ready to leave. He was sitting in the living room in his usual chair near a window that looks out on a terrace at the rear. At that moment one of his children came rushing up all excited, saying, "Look, they're here again!" Struck by his child's insistence, Mr. J rose and went out onto the terrace. This forms, together with the garden, a large L-shaped open space behind a cluster of houses. Mr. J saw the young Moroccan, who was at the back garden of his house, in the other branch of L, pointing at the sky and stating, "See, one's just coming." Mr. J told me, "I don't understand how this

boy could say that so calmly, as if it was a commonplace remark, because I almost fell over backwards when I looked up. I tell you that if you have not seen one, you cannot believe it. It was enormous."

Mr. J then spontaneously set about drawing the object, which was lozenge-shaped, with two white lights at each corner and, in the center, a kind of illuminated bell projecting from the platform (figure 1). The surface of the object was dark but clearly visible against the brighter sky. It had been a sunny day, and the sky was perfectly clear. Stars were visible around the object. It glided slowly from southwest to northeast, without the slightest sound. It could be followed at a comfortable walking pace. The large diagonal of the lozenge was perpendicular to the direction of movement and was at least 35 meters long. During my visit Mr. J went onto the terrace to show me his reference marks. The nearest end of the large diagonal had been directly above his house and the other end had passed above a large building 35-40 meters away. He was unable to determine the altitude of the object, but he noticed that he could see the sky between the object and the building opposite. As a result he felt that the object could have been even larger than the distance between his house and the building.

A little later on, Mr. J reported that the white lights flashed off and on regularly. I asked him whether they did this at the same time. He replied, "I don't know. I couldn't see the four corners simultaneously. I had to crane my neck." These lights were circular and large. "The most extraordinary thing about them was their power," he said. They illuminated the ground with a white light. In the center of the lozenge was an "inverted bell" which was wholly illuminated by an orange light. At the bell's apex was a green light, darker than green traffic lights. The skirt of the bell was surrounded by a row of red lights, changing brightness sequentially. This gave a false impression of revolving lights. "These lights never completely went out, but they grew distinctly brighter at certain moments."

The lights did not illuminate the underside of the object, which remained dark. The red lights "chased each other" with a slow, comfortable movement. "It wasn't an alarming flash, like that from an ambulance or police car. It was even pleasant to watch." Mr. J also remembered that "the luminous bell was strange, because you couldn't tell whether the light came from its interior or the surface." Since the witness was an amateur photographer, he considered going to find his camera but realized it was too big to capture adequately. Knowing that he had 100 ASA film loaded, he gauged that the mass of the object, which was almost black, would not be made out on film since the white lights were too dazzling.

He did what he could. "I tried to remember as much as possible. I also called my wife and daughter so that someone from my family could see it." Mrs. J did not see the object. She heard her husband but was in the bath. His daughter arrived after the object was already some way off, having passed over the roofs of the houses. Mr. J went with her to the front, where they stayed long enough to see the object leave, still at a fairly slow speed, passing over the Eupen cemetery.

Mr. J bitterly regrets not having taken photos. Since then he has been to Aix-la-Chapelle to buy infrared film, which he keeps in the refrigerator. The young Moroccan came over while Mr. J was drawing his picture for me. He said, unasked, "Yes, it's like that." The vertical edge (on figure 1) was not visible on December 1. Mr. J drew it based on his second sighting.

This second sighting took place on Wednesday, January 10, 1990, at about 7:35 p.m. It was dark. The witness, on his way to a photo club, had taken the E5 highway after reaching the Herbesthal road and was proceeding inland. He had gone only a few kilometers when he saw a stationary object in the sky. It was exactly "the same model." Mr. J stopped his car on the side of the road. Other drivers seemed not to notice anything. Mr. J leaned on the hood of his car, watching the object with arms crossed. Everything was identical to the first sighting, but on this occasion the lozenge was oriented sideways, and he could see it had a constant and considerable height. It was about 500 meters away. Its lights seemed less bright this time, perhaps because of the highway illumination.

Mr. J was exasperated that he hadn't brought his camera. There would probably be no point in returning home. After 10-15 minutes the object started to move off toward Fagnes. It left slowly and silently. Just as it was departing the luminosity increased. "It was as though the voltage of the lights had been intensified as it moved gently away."

It may seem strange that Mr. J saw the same object twice. It should, however, not be forgotten that the events of December 1 had been deeply etched in his memory; as a consequence, his mental "filters" would have been adjusted in such a way that he would more easily notice a similar object in the sky at night. I have no reason to doubt this eyewitness report. His sincerity and spontaneity were evident. The witness had spoken with only a few people and had learned to be cautious. "I have seen many things in my life," he said, "but when I talk about this, people look at me oddly."

A UFO flies over Aix-la-Chapelle

On December 5 or 12, 1989, Mr. and Mrs. O were driving northwards on the Trierersstrasse in the town of Aix-la-Chapelle. It was about 9:50 p.m. when they suddenly saw a flying object cut across the road right in front of them. It moved steadily to the right. It had two headlights in front, emitting beams that slanted downwards. The light was white and intense without being blinding. In addition, there was an orange light on the underside, flashing at the same rate as an ambulance's lights. Mr. O was driving and had to pay attention to traffic, but Mrs. O

continued to observe what they still thought was an aircraft flying exceptionally low. She kept it constantly in sight. When it had crossed the road, it extinguished its headlights, but the flashing orange light remained illuminated. This made it possible to see that the object was describing a half-turn on a tight curve, heading back in the opposite direction.

Mrs. O first saw it through the front righthand window. Then she turned around to look at it through the back rear window. The object approached again, passed over the car, and reappeared in the front lefthand window. It had cut across the road diagonally. At a certain distance from the car, its headlights came on again. Since the headlights were at the front of the object, they could no longer be seen directly, but the beams that they emitted were visible. Unlike an aircraft, there were no rear lights or flashing red and green side-lights. All that could be seen was the flashing orange light, which became fainter and fainter as the craft went away.

Mr. and Mrs. O returned to their home, near Aix-la-Chapelle. That same evening, at 11:15 p.m., Mr. O stepped outside to let the dog out and noticed exactly the same object. It was flying above their street, in the direction of Stollberg. Mr. O immediately called his wife. The headlight beams were less angled than they had been before, but the machine was flying lower. Its motion was linear and uniform, with a speed about that of a helicopter, but to the great astonishment of the witnesses it made no sound. Mrs. O was insistent about the absence of noise, for conditions were such that she and her husband ought to have heard it had the craft been equipped with a motor.

I asked them later about the apparent size of the object, suggesting that a thumb held at arm's length might cover it. The immediate response was, "No, it would have required a whole hand." The sighting occurred fairly late, so the sky was dark. The object stood out clearly against it, because it was somewhat brighter. The witnesses saw an elongated shape, less high than long, with curved edges. The outlines were different from those of an aircraft or helicopter. The hypothesis of night gliders or ultralights is not very credible, particularly in the case of the first sighting. The next day a police car passed down the street, its loud-speaker requesting those who had seen "anything abnormal" to report it to them. Mr. and Mrs. O did not do so. Were there other witnesses? They do not know, because they don't read the local paper. Mr. O, who is Japanese, subscribes to a Cologne daily paper and the *Financial Times*.

I was alerted to this case by Mrs. O's sister, who lives in Eupen. The German police habitually ridicule UFO witnesses, so it is not surprising that Mr. and Mrs. O didn't want to report their sighting. I also conducted an inquiry into a close encounter involving two German families living in Lontzen, in Belgium, on November 29. The children involved were frightened, so one of the mothers called various places, including the Aix-la-Chapelle police. She told me that they laughed at her and that their derisive response had shocked her.

A triangular UFO at Coblenz

The following case was described in the July-August 1990 issue of the *Journal fur UFO-Forschung* (*Journal for UFO Research*) of the GEP group (Society for the Investigation of the UFO phenomenon), based in Ludenscheid, Germany. The investigation was carried out by W. Kelch. This case is interesting in itself, since it involves the sighting of a triangle in another country, but it also has interesting psychological aspects. The principal witness, a 33-year-old woman, works at a military base and seems to have a solid character.

The sighting took place on the evening of February 21, 1990, at 9:07 p.m., in Karthause, near Coblenz. The lady was returning home by car, accompanied by her mother (aged 69) and her son (aged 14), who had been to a judo lesson. They were driving through an attractive residential district on a fairly wide road. To the right was a continuous line of trees 15-18 meters in height, bordering a cemetery. The lefthand side of the road was fringed with houses 20-25 meters high on a small hill. Through traffic is virtually nil and, at this late stage of the evening, there was no residential traffic. In fact, no car went by during the episode. The weather was cool and it was dark. The sky was clear.

The mother was the first to see two lights beaming straight down at them at a 45-degree angle (figure 2a). The object bearing these lights slowed down, but the driver, fearing it might crash, pulled to the right side of the road. There she stopped, with the car at an angle. The object stopped above the road, almost directly overhead. The driver switched off the engine, lowered the window and looked out. She saw a large triangular object, absolutely stationary and noiseless, at rooftop height. From other reference points it was possible to determine that the sides of the triangle measured about 20 meters (figure 2b). The witnesses watched the object closely, but no one dared get out of the car.

Three milky, yellowish-white lights were at the corners of the triangle. They were bright but not blinding. In the center of the triangle was a much larger light. Its color was changing but the prevailing hue was grey-blue. These changes seemed to imply something revolving, reminding the witnesses of the mirror-globes in discos. The witnesses said that "this light shone in a strange way." They saw only the lower side of the triangular platform. The object had a metallic appearance. It was dark-gray and colorless, with solid and sharp outlines. The base was slightly illuminated by the lights on the object, allowing the witnesses to observe structures which they described as riveted plates (figure 2b).

The object stayed overhead for two or three minutes, then departed suddenly in the direction of the houses. The driver of the car felt a breeze through her rolled-down

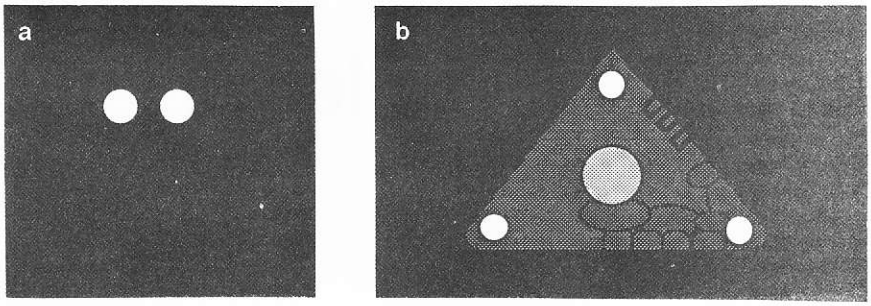

Figure 2

window. The object accelerated and disappeared from view in less than a second, behind the roofs of the houses. It had arrived from the west, but departed towards the southwest. Its departure was speedier than that of a jet aircraft.

The witnesses then went home, and the woman immediately informed her husband, who was on night-shift. At first he was unwilling to believe her story but finally, at her insistence, called the local police. Although the police had not received any other calls, they agreed to send a police squad to the area. Her husband also called the air-traffic sections at the Frankfurt and Cologne-Wahn airports. They responded that radar detection was not possible at so low an altitude. The three witnesses were unable to sleep that night. The mother, feeling afraid, stayed in her daughter's apartment.

Later on the wife tried to clear up the mystery on her own initiative. She found the address and telephone numbers of the GEP, who sent her aquestionnaire which she completed and returned by mail. She succeeded in locating two other witnesses. Between 8:30 and 8:50 that same evening, a lady saw "something bright heading quite rapidly towards my car," near the intersection of the A61 and A48 highways. Frightened, she braked. Through the sunroof she saw a bus-shaped metallic object with fairly bright, bluish lights. The object went by noiselessly, disappearing finally in the dark. A UFO was also seen by a 30-year-old man, just before 9:07 p.m., near the same spot. When questioned, however, he distanced himself from the incident, saying, "Nobody's going to believe me anyway."

When the GEP investigator contacted the police, they asserted that they could not recall having received any telephone calls about UFOs and that they knew nothing of the matter. The lady and her husband were annoyed by this denial. The investigator had the impression that the wife was a down-to-earth sort of individual. He found no discrepancy between her account and the questionnaire she had completed. So far as the witness was concerned, she had seen an unidentified flying object.

The GEP tried to find a conventional explanation. A balloon was ruled out because there had been a light east wind and the object was first seen moving west to east. And how could it have turned around and left so fast? The police use BO-105 helicopters to patrol the highways for trucks, but this too was ruled out. Could it have been a military plane? There is in actual fact a military exercise ground (Schmitenhohe) two kilometers away, where German and NATO forces run nocturnal infrared reconnaissance flights and other exercises. But that night here had been no exercises.

In Germany a CH-47 Chinook helicopter is often suggested as an explanation for UFO reports. Such aircraft are used between Mendig and Mainz, but the flights take place almost exclusively during the day at a height of 800-1000 meters. Taken as a whole, the evidence in this case renders that explanation unlikely. Nevertheless, the investigator thought it necessary to consider the possibility that the three witnesses were in shock and had perhaps not heard the noise, having been paralyzed by fear. The investigator thus concluded noncommittally that "the available data do not allow us to make an unambiguous identification as a known flying object." You can make what you like about this statement. Who is frightened? The witnesses by a somewhat hypothetical helicopter, or the investigator by social and psychological pressures?

A recent sighting in Switzerland

This event occurred on Sunday, October 14, 1990. The Swiss sighting was relayed to me by the witness, Mrs. Wengere, who has authorized me to cite her name. She telephoned me from Switzerland and confirmed her account in writing. An editor by profession, she was clearly looking for people who would listen seriously to such reports. She wrote to a Zurich paper and personally collected various recent eyewitness reports, a copy of which she sent me.

On the evening of October 14 she and her husband were on their way to a hospital to visit a friend. It was about 7 p.m., already dark, with stars easily visible. The sky was clear and there was no wind. They were driving from Lostdorf, near Olten, toward Zurich. Mrs. Wengere spotted two bright white lights.They were motionless, a

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The Truman MJ-12 letter

by Ted R. Spickler

■■ Ted R. Spickler, Ph.D., views the UFO scene from his home in Wheeling, West Virginia.

The fascinating exchange between Stanton Friedman ("MJ-12: The Jury Is Still Out," *IUR*, March/April 1990) and Joe Nickell and John F. Fischer ("The Crashed-Saucer Forgeries" in the same issue) got me out of my armchair.

Nickell and Fischer refer to Harry Truman's signature found by Philip J. Klass on a letter sent by Truman to Vannevar Bush on October 1, 1947, and call it an "identical match" to the signature on the controversial September 24, 1947, group-authorization letter. From this they conclude that the MJ-12 document is a forgery. Friedman counters that "as persons who used a light table for comparison found out, it was not identical at all." On the other hand, in his *Skeptical Inquirer* article (Winter 1990) Klass calls the two signatures "suspiciously alike" and later "identical."

The difference in opinion seems to come from a slight stretching effect explained by Klass as due to normal expansion of photocopies. It may also be due to the lack of an original paper document in the case of the MJ-12 memo, which arrived on a roll of film. If all we have is a 35mm negative of the document, we can anticipate an enlargement to be slightly over- or undersized. One signature stretched relative to the alleged original is not surprising.

The use of a Xerox machine that reduces images by a controlled amount and makes images on transparency film allows all *IUR* readers to see exactly what I saw when I shrank the MJ-12 signature by three percent and placed it over the Bush letter (figure 2). Alignment of these two images is tricky but reveals the two signatures to be exactly and perfectly identical. In fact, twisting one image slightly, then back, shows an identical length for the cross of the "T" in both signatures while at the same time the length of the flourish on the "N" is likewise identical.

Friedman implies that only part of the signature was stretched. This may appear to be the case, since you can superimpose the unshrunk MJ-12 signature on top of the other and most of the "Harry" looks fine, but by the time you gaze at the end of the "Truman," the two are clearly out of sync (figure 1). This is due to the linear character of the shrinkage. It takes a while before one signature is seen to diverge from the other.

I did not make any measurements on the two signatures because it is not necessary to do so. If a complex pattern on a two-dimensional surface appears to match exactly with another complex pattern on another surface, the two patterns can be declared the same if one of them superimposes perfectly on top of the other. Measurements are not needed to verify their exact correspondence. The length of the long cross on the "T" of Truman can be seen to match the same length on the other signatures' "T" by very slightly twisting the overhead transparency copy (of the MJ-12 signature) relative to the printed copy of the other signature underneath it. The same process holds for the length of the ending of the "N." In both cases the lengths of the lines are visually seen as the same without the need of making any measurements. The use of overhead transparency film replaces the need for a light table, since the transparency film is clear except for the black lines which constitute the copied signature.

There is no doubt in my mind that these two signatures are really the same. Evidently a forger using a copy machine appended an authentic signature (written on October 1) to a bogus document (spuriously dated September 24). I do not accept the claim that someone will casually reproduce his own signature in such a precise manner. It is time to bring down the curtain on the MJ-12 document and give the bout to Klass this one time. The conclusion that the MJ-12 paper is a clever forgery seems inescapable.

Before the debunkers get too jovial, however, we must take Nickell and Fischer to task for lightly dismissing Leonard H. Stringfield's research as the mere collecting of "proliferating tales" and "dubious accounts." We must also chide them for trying as hard as possible to discredit the exhaustive work of Friedman and others (such as CUFOS' Don Schmitt and Kevin Randle) on the Roswell crash. As more and more witnesses come forward, it is harder and harder to chalk this one off. If the skeptics have won the MJ-12 battle, they appear to be losing the Roswell war. ■

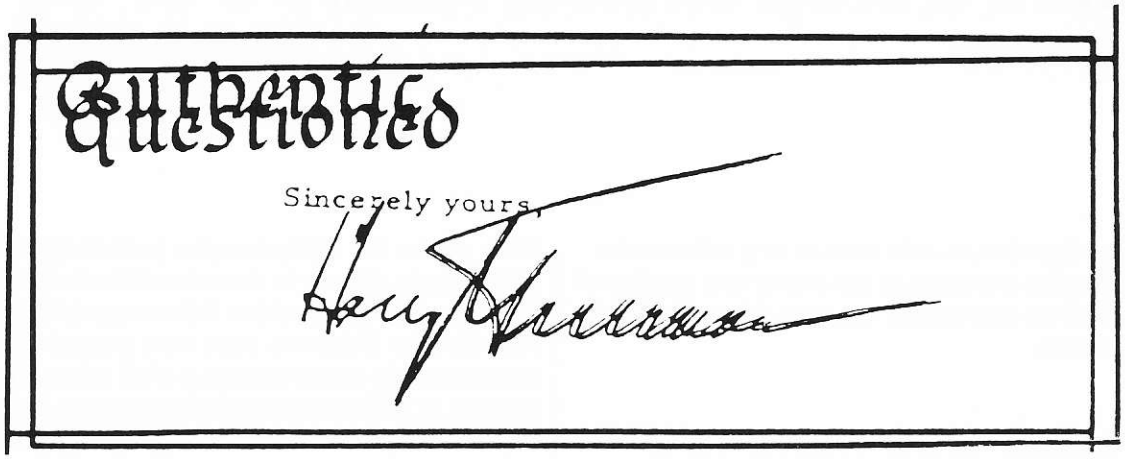

Figure 1

Authentic signature superimposed over MJ-12 signature that is not shrunk, giving impression of dissimilar signatures.

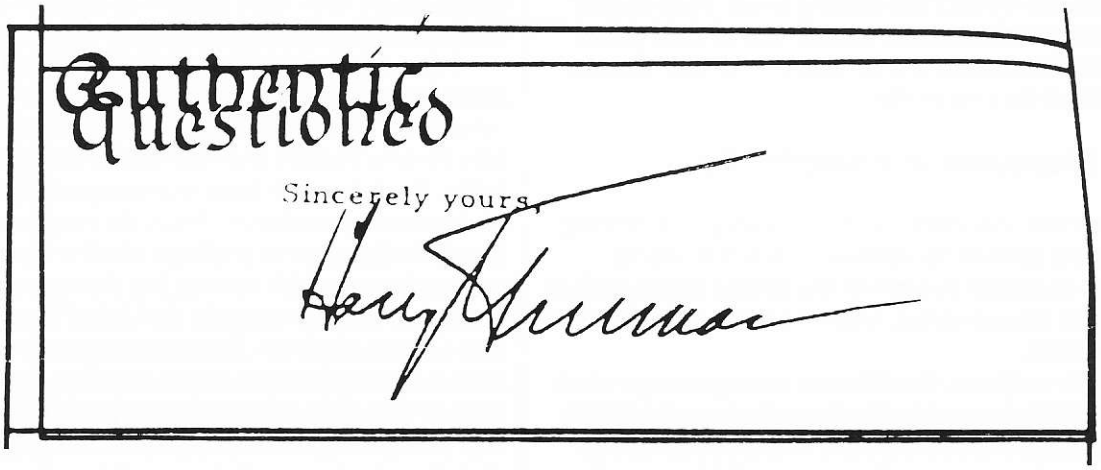

Figure 2

Authentic signature superimposed over MJ-12 signature that is shrunk by 3%

Nature's crop circles, nature's UFOs

by Jenny Randles

■■ **Jenny Randles, an *IUR* contributing editor and a leading English ufologist, is the author of a number of books on UFOs and related subjects. She edits *Northern UFO News*.**

Chris Rutkowski should be applauded for his generally excellent article "Harvesting Useful Data from Crop Circles" (*IUR*, March/April). He recognizes a crucial point so many others have overlooked. Paul Fuller and I have had to remind people continually about it, since publication of our book *Crop Circles* (1990). True, as he says, circles are *not* a new phenomenon, but he goes on to make a questionable assumption, that the "circles themselves have been evolving with time" and growing in number and frequency of occurrence.

In fact, these two issues go right to the heart of the mystery, alongside the historicity of the phenomenon and the importance of eyewitnesses which Rutkowski mentions and which I was pleased to see. I beg readers' indulgence to elaborate on why all four of these points cannot be overlooked and to suggest what they seem to mean about the crop circles.

The increase in complexity

If it were true that circles displayed undisputed growing complexity summer by summer, that fact would be difficult to explain in terms of any natural theory, such as that of the ionized vortex, which I believe to be the cause of the circles.

Fuller and I saw this dilemma some years ago when British circles *seemed* to alter from single marks (1980) to formations of five (1983) and ringed circles (1986). There have been cases in Scotland and Wales; to call them English circles only reinforces the myth of localization. What we did with this problem was to seek out historical precedents, based on the possibility that sampling factors were to blame for this apparent escalation. We found such cases readily. There was soon no doubt that all patterns cited above *had* occurred well prior to 1980 and the alleged increase in complexity which some books on crop circles are still repeating does not exist—at least in cases recorded up until about 1989.

We learned that media sources tended to focus on the unusual patterns at the expense of the mundane. Thus in 1989, when a few highly complex patterns appeared (interestingly, directly in the wake of the massive media publicity given to the subject following publication of the book *Circular Evidence*), these were promoted as the standards to the virtual exclusion of all others. The same was true in 1990 of the so-called pictograms (key shapes, claw features, and other unusual appearances). What is generally not appreciated is that well over 90 percent of the 700 circles in Britain last summer were not pictograms but, again, just simple single marks.

In other words, these complex shapes which many people assume were widespread last year were in fact few in number and nearly all located in a narrow region of southern England where the world's media cameras were focused. A few overseas pictograms did follow—but only after publicity for the British ones. Media sampling (which promoted these dozen or so complex patterns as typical) created an illusion of major change in the phenomenon, which was not helped by crop-circle researchers who, eager to disprove any weather-based theory, seized upon these patterns as disproof and exaggerated the significance of these isolated examples.

I do not believe that wind vortices created the pictograms, though serious research into that possibility continues. I know I differ here in my evaluation from both Terence Meaden and BUFORA colleague Paul Fuller. But saying this in no way compromises my views on the solution to other evidence. An exaplanation that fits all the data prior to a splurge of a few intensely promoted cases which came at just the time when the theory was gaining respect in the United Kingdom (less than a month after *New Scientist* first gave it detailed serious coverage) should not be discarded lightly. I can think of very good reasons why the pictograms might well be expected, based on our sure knowledge that crop-circle hoaxing has greatly increased from just a few known cases before 1989 to a far higher figure deduced from my own personal site investigations in 1990. I would put the hoaxes to comprise something over 50 percent of the total.

Any researcher who does not anticipate that the enormous media interest in circles and the ease with which they can be faked would not lead to this escalation of contamination is foolish or wildly optimistic. In fact, in *Crop Circles* (written *before* the summer of 1990) we predicted the arrival of the complex pictogram formations for that reason.

The escalation in numbers

Again one must take many factors into consideration. True, between 1980 and 1989 the number of crop-circle events in the UK rose from a handful a year to about 100, but this was to be expected. It was connected with the growing public awareness coupled with the rising number of researchers looking for and collating circle data. We can reasonably confirm this by comparing circle totals per summer with press stories afforded the subject in the same period. A correlation can be demonstrated.

In addition, our retrospective collection of historical—pre-1980—circle data for *Crop Circles* showed a constant undercurrent of cases in the UK and elsewhere, but these were generally treated as isolated examples in local communities. No phenomenon name had been invented to offer a slot into which people could place the reports. Once that did occur in 1980, it was bound to inflate the apparent size of the phenomenon. The same thing happened with UFOs. We now know plenty of sightings occurred prior to 1947. Yet the invention of a flying-saucer terminology and attendant increasing media interest produced just the same sort of illusion of sudden arrival and escalation of the phenomenon.

One important clue we found from our historical search was that the pre-1980 cases in England nearly all came from counties other than the two in Wessex (Hampshire and Wiltshire). These are now at the focus of attention and still regarded as the home of crop circles. A few researchers (Colin Andrews and Pat Delgado in *Circular Evidence* and George Wingfield elsewhere) have grudgingly allowed for the appearance of circles in other parts of Britain but see this as a fanning out from Wessex. Our research into pre-1980 cases suggests otherwise, however. It indicates that intense scrutiny and attention on this one small area have meant that nearly all the circles appearing here tended to be found—and that in recent summers hoaxers were drawn here as the place where their handiwork should be displayed if it was to get the attention of crop-circle researchers. Circles elsewhere were generally not reported until after circles became a national debate.

But they were still occurring. In my opinion there is a moderate upper limit of the number of real crop-circle events appearing in the UK (and probably then by extrapolation the world) in each summer.

Let us speculate that there are approximately 150 a year in Britain—a figure we have reason to regard as not wildly inaccurate. Then, as media interest and circle-researching grew from 1980 to 1988 (as one illustration people started using light aircraft for this, bringing into visibility many previously unfound circles), the *percentage* discovered per year was increased. Furthermore, because some of these inevitably occurred outside the Wessex area, it was not until systematic attempts were made to get data from these other regions that another escalation in the percentage took place. It is not at all surprising that the number of circles gradually increased each summer to the point at which most of these 150 were traced.

Things changed dramatically in 1989. There can be no disputing that. We had over 300 circles that year and over 700 in 1990. But that change cannot be divorced from two facts. As my on-site investigations have shown and as I mentioned earlier, hoaxing has now become an important element, and it is occurring much more frequently. Many esoteric and fringe occult societies have suddenly heard of crop circles and adopted them; this, too, is probably linked to the increase in totals.

The real key, however, is the media publicity generated by the huge interest in Andrews and Delgado's phenomenally successful first book in 1989. Around that time I was continually asked about circles in interviews I did (ostensibly about UFOs); most people were amazed when I told them it was a subject I had researched since 1982, had first been quoted extensively on in the national press in 1983, had first appeared on national TV discussing it with a scientist in 1985, had first published a book about (*Mystery of the Circles* with Paul Fuller) in 1986 and had even mentioned in a 1987 book, *The UFO Conspiracy* —which includes a photograph. Everybody assumed this was a new mystery.

We can demonstrate that this publicity and switch-on of public awareness preceded the dramatic increase in circle totals. We can also demonstrate that over two summers, so far, publicity and circle totals correlate. There were 10 times as many stories in the UK press in 1990 as in 1988 and about five times as many circles were found. The arrival of the circles post-dated the publicity. Indeed I have done some interesting regional studies (summarized in Fuller's journal *The Crop Watcher*) in which we see that if the media regionally promote one rare circle type (a ring, for example), this becomes the norm in circles found in that area for the next few weeks—suggesting the influence of media publicity.

The historical circles

It would be foolish to conclude that because we have found some cases of folktales and contemporary written records which *seem* to describe circle events (the oldest so far dating to August 1590 in the Netherlands) there *is* a historical precedent. But it is at least suggestive of that. What seem undeniable are the growing number of pre-1980 cases of circles, including some that go back to the first half of this century.

The search for pre-1980 circles is of paramount importance. If we can prove that they have occurred for centuries, then I believe we have established that some natural force is responsible. This force need not be Meaden's ionized vortex, of course. My support for that is largely based on its ability to fit the evidence but is

also partially related to the fact that it is the only testable hypothesis anyone has come up with in 10 years. To say that circles result from unknown intelligences doing unknown things in unknown ways (as do many of Meaden's critics) is to say nothing.

We must also exercise care. For instance, the Tully, Queensland, case of 1966 does look interesting (especially with the reappearance of circles there more recently). But there are also reasons to suspect it is not the same thing.

We should exclude cases without clear evidence of swirling or straight edges.

The eyewitnesses

In my opinion the eyewitness testimony makes all the difference to how one interprets the crop-circle phenomenon. It has been steadily growing over the past two or three years, with many new data added since we wrote our book early in 1990.

Rutkowski poses the question of eyewitness testimony of UFOs creating saucer nests. There are two answers. First, we do not know that the saucer nests are the same thing. If UFOs in any extraterrestrial sense exist, they could conceivably leave circular impressions in the ground. That question is relevant to crop circles only if it is unequivocally established that saucer nests are crop circles. In cases such as Tully that is by no means certain. Second, as we show in our book, it is apparent that some of the mechanisms that forge crop circles are visual and do look like UFOs. Indeed on a strict definition a Meaden vortex is a UFO in that it remains contentious and not fully explained by science.

Take a look at some of the UFO cases we exhumed in our book. Till then they had been seen as baffling mysteries. Perhaps not everyone will agree with our suggestion that the application of the ionized-vortex idea to them solves these cases, but I believe this possibility at least deserves an airing. Consider these two examples:

Salto, Uruguay, February 18, 1977 (page 163): At 4 a.m. people saw strange lights which attended a loss of generator-driven power at the ranch. A Saturn-shaped mass, glowing orange, hovered low over fields, sending animals into a frenzy. The mass rocked from side to side and shook trees adjacent to it and tore off branches. Six beams of "white lightning" shot from the thing, and a fearless dog which attacked it began to howl as it came in close proximity. As a witness approached it, he felt waves of heat and an electrical field and even suffered muscle paralysis and shock.

The glow turned red and shot upwards, and the generators began to work again. All wiring was burned out. The rancher suffered a severe skin rash, and the dog died three days later. An autopsy by a local veterinarian revealed it had been "cooked" internally. Below where the mass had just hovered, a 30-foot diameter circle of flattened grass was found.

Rosedale, Victoria, Australia, September 30, 1980 (pages 216-220): A domed mass appeared above a ranch at 1 a.m., making a screeching and whistling sound and disturbing animals. Water was sucked or evaporated out of a water tank. The object settled on the ground beyond. The rancher went closer and felt his muscles wobble "like a plate of jelly." Then a black tube emerged from the base of the object, and a huge bang sounded. Six "spokes" came from the base near the tube, and the thing rose slowly skywards trailing debris sucked up from the ground in its wake. There were also apparent electrical disturbances, but the most notable feature was the discovery at the place where the UFO departed of a typical flattened crop ring some 25 feet in diameter. It was swirled counterclockwise and was flattened in an image of the six spokes. The effect is comparable to one seen in a British crop-circle case.

Of course one is at liberty to interpret such cases as evidence for alien spacecraft, but is that necessary? If we accept that these witnesses observed real phenomena, then ponder the option that it was the vortex that Meaden has theoretically defined to explain crop circles while being unaware of such cases. Suddenly so much that is baffling opens to understanding.

The screeching, whistling sounds are akin to rotating vortices. The severe disturbance to trees nearby indicates intense winds. The black tube emerging from the Rosedale object sounds like a vortex funnel. There was obviously an upwards suction effect littering the debris on the ground. Yet unlike ordinary tornado or whirlwind effects (which Meaden is *not* saying create the circles) here we have phenomena that remained stationary for long enough when in close proximity to the ground to leave clear circular traces.

I feel a sense of excitement as I review much evidence in the light of the Meaden vortex theory. Our book shows how other cases are similarly transformed when considered in this new light. At least one classic abduction—in the top 50 list drawn up by Thomas E. Bullard—involved a swirled circle on wet tarmac left by an object remarkably like the one at Salto. Other, more recent cases also fit into this image of an ionized plasma vortex.

To conclude, let me make myself clear:

I am not suggesting that every UFO is a Meaden vortex. Of course not. In fact, though I remain unpersuaded of the reality of alien spacecraft, such are not disproven by the possibility of the vortex. I do feel, however, that many close encounters are caused by sightings of ionized vortices. At the same time I do not propose a debunking exercise to rid the world of spaceships. I feel that our work constitutes a legitimate attempt to try to resolve some classic UFO data in line with an avant garde scientific theory designed for another purpose. After all, are we not in the business of trying to solve mysteries rather than perpetuate them?

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Patterns in the data

by Chris Rutkowski

■■ **Chris Rutkowski, an *IUR* contributing editor, is a graduate student in the sciences at the University of Manitoba and an active member of UFO Research Manitoba. He edits *Swamp Gas News*.**

Once a UFO report has been made, the investigator usually files it in some fashion. Whether the report ends up on a single index card in somebody's shoebox or in a color-coded file in one of dozens of cabinets owned by a major UFO group, there will usually exist some permanent record of the report. But what is done with these reports is a bit of a problem.

There have been a number of attempts to systematically analyze large numbers of UFO reports. Perhaps the best known is UFOCAT, at CUFOS. Most other major groups have their own systems, including the BUFORA Computer Project, Project URD in Sweden, and the various computer projects devloped by ICUFOS in Italy. In the United States UNICAT has sought to computerize UFO databases.

The results of the analyses of UFO reports sometimes yield interesting results. UFO buffs will say that they file their reports in the hope that one day they will unlock the Rosetta stone of UFO origins. Skeptics typically argue that UFO-report files are nothing more than a waste of time. But because UFO reports constitute at the very least a sociological record, the value of the reports must lie somewhere between the two extremes.

For example, to an astronomer UFO reports are interesting for their possible evalation as meteors and fireballs. This is certainly true in Canada, where the National Research Council maintains a Non-Meteoric Sightings File, in addition to its Meteor File. Both files contain "UFO" reports, with the majority being IFO meteors and bolides. The files are useful in the triangulation of meteors for discovering meteorites.

Though it is difficult to do much with small collections of UFO data, once 100 or so reports are gathered, it is possible to use some basic statistical techniques on them. In *UFOs 1947-1987* John Spencer, Jacques Vallee, and Maurizio Verga discussed computer analyses of UFO data. The investigators of many countries all have their own attempts to analyze UFO data.

In Manitoba the UFO Research Manitoba (UFOROM) database now comprises over 700 reports. In 1978 some preliminary analysis was done using borrowed time on a PDP-11 computer at the University of Manitoba. This early stage of MANUFOCAT was basically a counting program using FORTRAN and was simply a convenient way of tabulating the data. In 1981 a more rigorous analysis was done on the same system using SPSS and was published in 1983.

The interpretation of the MANUFOCAT analyses yielded some curious results. It confirmed, for example, Jenny Randles' discovery that there are on the average 2.5 witnesses per UFO report, and it was possible to derive a mathematical formula to predict the number of witnesses for any group of UFO reports. Also discovered was an overall peak in reports at 10 p.m., confirming others' analyses. Furthermore the breakdown of nocturnal lights and daylight discs was better established. A number of other points were flushed out by the analysis and despite its rudimentary nature, MANUFOCAT was cautiously declared useful in its attempt to learn more about the nature of UFOs.

Recently the UFOROM files were reevaluated. They were then coded and entered in BASIC into a Commodore 64 program. (Ideally this would be better done on an IBMclone with a hard drive to facilitate real data manipulation.) Again, this was basically a read-and-print program which will require some jellyware for the analysis. The results are as follows:

For Manitoba alone 701 UFO cases were analyzed. The earliest comes from 1792, and the latest reflects the 1989 Canadian wave.

The hourly breakdown is unchanged. The peak is at 2200 hours, and the trough is at about 1100 hours. We can understand this because most UFO sightings are of nocturnal lights. (Skeptics often suggest that there is some relation between the ingestion of liquor and the reporting of UFOs. If UFOs were really observed by drunks leaving bars at closing time, then certainly a peak would occur at 1 or 2 a.m., when the bars close. Besides, UFO investigators rarely find that any of their UFO witnesses have been drinking to excess.)

The MANUFOCAT record is sporadic earlier than 1965. This is because no UFO group existed in the area before then, and sighting information for this early period comesm largely from Projects Blue Book and Magnet as well as other sources. For the years 1967-1989 the average number of sightings per year is just under 27. Furthermore the Manitoba UFO waves seem to have occurred in 1952, 1967, and 1975, consistent with other

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Book reviews

***Phantoms of the Sky: UFOs—A Modern Myth?* by David Clarke and Andy Roberts. London: Robert Hale, 1990. 184pp. £12.95.**

David Clarke and Andy Roberts' *Phantoms of the Sky* will likely appeal to some of the authors' British colleagues and a few American skeptics of the no-ETs-at-any-cost school. Other readers with analytical minds, a thorough knowledge of UFO data, and a preference for a free-flowing writing style may not get past Jenny Randles' rambling foreword.

UFOs, the authors declare, are "phantoms of the sky" and ufology is "space age folklore." The "abduction craze" is undoubtedly related to the state of "religious flux" in the United Kingdom and the United States and is the product of UFO investigators themselves. Corn circles are weather anomalies, the "few authentic photos of alleged UFOs . . . all depict blobs of light and not solid flying saucers" (hardly what the McMinnville, Oregon, or Trindade Island photos depict, to cite but two examples), and the idea of government cover-ups is belief-driven. Yet "no one, least of all the USAF, now doubts that something did come down at Roswell that July day." We are also told that intelligence agencies have to "keep track of ufologists because they are a potential source of problems."

A number of errors in the text demonstrate the writers' shallow knowledge of technical matters and UFO history. The Dahl/Crisman Maury Island event of the summer of 1947 is seriously misrepresented. Drawing on a dubious and unsupported claim by John Keel, Clarke and Roberts present the story as an example of illegal nuclear waste-dumping, when in fact, as Dahl and Crisman themselves confessed to Air Force investigators in 1947, their claim was fiction from beginning to end—a joke that got out of hand. Certainly more than "200" abductions have been recorded as of late 1990. The "mystery helicopter" photo (facing page 97) looks like a plain old Bell Jet Ranger to me. Clarke and Roberts' contrary claim notwithstanding, there *was* an announcement between acts of the 1938 radio production of *War of the Worlds* identifying the broadcast as a dramatization by the Mercury Theater.

Much taken with the work of Michael Persinger and Paul Devereux, the authors discuss at length luminous anomalies in Britain over the centuries. As a historical survey this section is as valuable as anything in the book. The volume is well-referenced and indexed, with bibliography and list of nine UFO organizations, publications, and funds.

Despite the shortcomings of the first eight chapters—relating mainly to a sometimes near-desperate effort to fit a too-big UFO mystery into a too-small folklore/earthlight shoe—the authors generally present their theses in a restrained, straightforward manner. The work of Budd Hopkins and David M. Jacobs is mentioned with respect but not, of course, acceptance.

For all their efforts to solve it, the authors succeed only in demonstrating that the UFO phenomenon remains a mystery. And so it is only in the last chapter that the writing really begins to flow and sometimes even to approach eloquence. This is probably because Clarke and Roberts have finally abandoned their examples and explanations—many of which just don't wash—and at last arrived at a place that makes them comfortable, where a potentially threatening, always puzzling phenomenon is safely domesticated and where, to the authors' immense relief, the UFO percipient's "beliefs and socialization are more important than what he claims to have seen."—*Jennie Zeidman*

***Bill Cooper and the Need for More Research (UFOs, Conspiracies, and the JFK Assassination)* by William E. Jones and Rebecca D. Minshall. Dublin, Ohio: MidOhio Research Associates, 1991. 33pp. $7.50.**

Where dumbness content is concerned, the yarns of Milton William Cooper are not all that special—naive and gullible flying-saucer fans have always had a particular fondness for claims that to any outsider would seem imbecilic—but Cooper's, unlike the rest, aren't even entertaining. Instead they bring to mind adjectives such as sick and venal. Cooper fuses crashed-saucer folklore with gruesome fantasies about malevolent, cannibalistic aliens, then tosses in conspiracy theories associated with the nut right. Anti-Semitism, until recently a latent theme in all this (see my editorial "Flying Saucer Fascism," *IUR*, July/August 1989), has recently moved to the fore as Cooper has incorporated the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, long known to be a forgery, into the mix.

Cooper's 15 minutes of fame may be over by now. One hopes so. One does not count on it. Among conspiracy-oriented saucer enthusiasts the emerging view seems to be that while Cooper himself may not be entirely credible, the problem is the messenger, not the message. Cooperism, with or without its namesake, will survive. In fact, it's been around in one form or another for nearly four decades.

In the 1950s George Adamski and the other flamboyant contactees of the period claimed knowledge, through direct contact, of friendly space people. That much is well known. What is generally less known is that they also reported there were unfriendly ETs who worked in league with evil earthlings, whiling away their days hatching plots against the human race. The evil earthlings

were called "International Bankers," traditionally an anti-Semitic code word, and they kept not only the UFO secrets but manipulated the economic, political, and social structure of the world to their advantage.

Early Cooperist sentiments appear in George Hunt Williamson and John McCoy's *UFOs Confidential!* (1958) and Williamson's *Road in the Sky* (1959; see especially the chapter on "The Unholy Six"). To Adamski, Williamson, and their associates the International Bankers were the force behind what Donald Keyhoe called the Silence Group. The words that follow are Williamson's, but Cooper could easily have written them: "Every king, president, or dictator on Earth is only a figure-head . . . a tool of the 'Hidden Empire.' For millennia this group has been determined to keep truth from mankind for selfish purposes! They have removed vital books and sections of the Holy Bible until it is unrecognizable . . . they have written history as they wished to, not as it really happened . . . they wave flags and scream 'Patriotism!' and thousands of young men, women and children die so that vast war machines may be fed. But mankind is waking up! Men are no longer content to remain 'stupid' and believe what they are told to believe. It matters not whether the 'authority' is religious, political, or otherwise, for there is only one *hierarchy* . . . the 'International Bankers.'"

According to Williamson, the "top figures in the Great Conspiracy" were (as of the late 1950s) Bernard Baruch, Felix Frankfurter, Herbert Lehman, and the Warburgs. I confess to not having read everything Cooper has written—I am not a masochist, and even if I were, there are only so many hours in the day—but I'm sure you'll find the same names somewhere in his collected works.

All that Cooper has done is to bring the conspiratorial side of traditional contactee lore to the forefront and to substitute secret documents he has seen for ETs he has met. I guess somebody had to do it.

Somebody probably also had to treat Cooper's yarns seriously enough to go to the trouble of investigating them critically, and William Jones and Rebecca Minshall have taken on the task. Jones tells me that the result "doesn't seem destined to hit the UFO best seller list." Quite. People who believe don't want to hear, and those who don't believe don't need to see the manifestly nonsensical soberly refuted.

But as a refutation, if that is what this is, Jones and Minshall's monograph leaves something to be desired. Though its authors are clearly sane and well-intentioned, a certain naivete bubbles periodically to the surface, as in their own willingness to consider conspiracy theories—relatively more restrained ones than Cooper's, to be sure, but conspiracy theories nonetheless. They are more receptive to the Kennedy-assassination conspiracy literature than, in my opinion anyway, they ought to be, and they find credible a claim, made by a writer with a John Birch Society orientation, that Truman-era Secretary of Defense James Forrestal did not commit suicide (as in fact he did, as a consequence of severe mental illness) but was done in by plotters at the highest level of the U.S. government. Like Cooper and like all conspiracy theorists of both right and left, Jones and Minshall flirt, albeit more reluctantly than those who have gone before them, with the idea that Washington may indeed be the seat of the Great Satan's empire. They fear that "there may be something evil at work in the world that showed itself in Dallas, Texas." Some of Cooper's claims have a "basis in fact" which justifies "further investigation into at least some of these issues."

I don't think so. Where Cooperism is concerned, one thinks of H. L. Mencken's dictum that one horselaugh is worth a thousand syllogisms. But if you can't manage a horselaugh, a plugged nose does the job just as well.

Bill Cooper and the Need for More Research is available from MidOhio Research Associates, Box 162, Dublin, Ohio 43017.—*Jerome Clark*

Patterns — *continued from page 17*

waves around the world.

For the purposes of filing, the Hynek system of classification was altered slightly. Nocturnal lights were divided into "nocturnal lights" and "nocturnal discs," the latter being objects seen at night too far away in the witnesses' estimation (or investigators' calculations) to classify as a close encounter but possessing definite shapes. NLs plus NDs represent 78 percent of the cases. DDs were 7.5 percent, and CEs represented a little over 10 percent.

Slightly over 12 percent ranked as unknowns. The earlier MANUFOCAT yielded an embarrasingly high 24 percent, but this was before a more rigorous examination of the reports was undertaken. Sightings are now also given a reliability rating, where 1 is little more than a rumor of an incident and 9 is a well-investigated case involving credible witnesses. When only those unknowns given a reliability rating of 7 or more are examined, the present percentage of unknowns drops to 8.7 percent. When only CEs are considered for the same group, the percentage drops to 3 percent, a much more reasonable figure.

But the most interesting result came from the monthly breakdown. Traditionally it has been said that there is a peak in UFO report numbers in the summer and a trough in winter. For Manitoba this seems logical; minus 40 degrees is hardly the temperature for outdoor activity in winter, and UFOs would not be expected to be reported in any great numbers because of the comparative absence of outdoor witnesses. Earlier MANUFOCAT analyses found the peak in May or June and the trough in December. This was curious because the best weather in Manitoba is usually July and August and the coldest

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Letters

Fabricated evidence?

To the editor:

To set the record straight, I have *never once* suspected, let alone believed, that the "Belgian government *fabricated* the radar evidence" which it made public in connection with two F-16s sent to investigate a UFO report on March 30-31, 1990, as suggested by Mark Rodeghier's editorial in the January/February issue of *IUR*.

In a casual conversation with Rodeghier and Don Schmitt before taping a TV show, I emphasized that I then had scant data on the incident and only poor-quality fourth-generation photocopies of the radar displays during the incident. I told them that the latter suggested "possible anomalies" in the F-16 radar and/or its computer, which generates the radar display. I added that I hoped to investigate this possibility when I received better photos and could find time to check with F-16 radar specialists at Westinghouse, which developed and produces the F-16 radar.

If Rodeghier or Schmitt had asked why I thought the Belgian government would be so stupid as to "fabricate" such evidence, this regrettable misunderstanding could have been avoided.

Philip J. Klass
Washington, D.C.

Mark Rodeghier responds:

I can understand Klass' unhappiness that his remarks concerning the provenance of the Belgian radar traces have been brought to public attention. I, too, would wish I hadn't said what he said. Nevertheless I've checked with Schmitt, who was with Klass and me at the taping, and he confirms that I have accurately paraphrased Klass' remarks. I rarely recall details of conversations from months ago, but this one has stuck in my mind. That would not be the case if Klass had referred to "possible anomalies," as he claims.

Klass tells me he is indeed looking into the Belgian report and the radar evidence. Fine. I'll listen carefully to what he has to say, just as I did in our first conversation on the subject.

Elusive pursuits

To the editor:

Mark Rodeghier's editorial "You Can't Always Get What You Want" (*IUR*, January/February) contained much good sense and good advice for persons who believe in the validity of some anomalous claim and who are interested in having the wider society, especially the scientific community, take it seriously. But I'd like to quibble over the assertion that "most scientists don't get involved in research these days unless there is money available."

That's a part of it, I agree. But more significant, I think, is that professional scientists learn to choose research topics that offer a reasonable chance of getting useful results within a reasonable length of time. That entails having a phenomenon that one can study *at will*, by available techniques. No past event qualifies, only a phenomenon that can be observed now and in the future. What specifically could anyone do to follow up on the Belgian wave? Move there and hope that it repeats itself? The study of such events is appropriate for historians, or perhaps sociologists, but not for natural scientists.

In my *The Enigma of Loch Ness* (1986) I discuss in several places why scientists do not and should not spend working hours on such elusive pursuits—and I point out, too, that saying that is not the same as excusing them for claiming that the phenomenon doesn't exist.

Henry H. Bauer, Ph.D.
Professor of chemistry and natural sciences
Department of chemistry
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia

Mark Rodeghier responds:

It is always a pleasure to receive comments on one's contributions to the ufological literature from someone as thoughtful as Dr. Bauer. This is true even when those comments come as disagreements with some of my contentions. I generally agree with his portrayal of the rationale underlying scientists' choice of research topics. In fact, a most interesting question is why some scientists continue to do work in the parasciences despite the low chance of success and lack of funding.

I do insist, however, that the Belgian sightings need not be relegated exclusively to the social scientists, as Bauer suggests. The existence of radar traces, videotapes, and photographs means that qualified physical scientists potentially can make important contributions to unraveling the explanations, if any are forthcoming, for the Belgian sightings.

CE circles and UGMs

To the editor:

In Chris Rutkowski's article "Harvesting Useful Data from Crop Circles" (*IUR*, March/April) there is what seems to me a misleading statement. Rutkowski writes of

the crop circles found in England since 1980, then says that the phenomenon is not new and that "Flattened circles and rings have been found in fields for many decades." But the circles seen in the English fields do seem to be a new phenomenon, and the statement I have quoted ignores their nature.

Look into Pat Delgado and Colin Andrews' *Circular Evidence* and you will see, in numerous photographs, and read that the circles in question share certain characteristics. Let me call them CE circles. CE circles have clearly defined perimeters, twisted whorls, and often complicated floor lays (and the later pictograms have them, too). The crop is never scorched at all or damaged on any large scale. Since the CE circle can be defined, with the usual difficulties of course, why ignore those characteristics that research has discovered only to throw it into a pot with all the scorched and squashed circles which have been found elsewhere and elsewhen? "Flattened circles and rings have been found in fields for many decades"—yes, but not CE circles. If it is thought that there is a connection, then it is quite proper to point that out, but to state the case as Rutkowski states it seems to muddle it.

As to whether the CE circles are new or not, surely it is more correct to call the phenomenon new rather than otherwise. There do seem to be a few good reports of such circles before 1980, but what of that beside the eruption of circles and their astounding evolution into pictograms since then?

It seems likely that those English crop fields, where hundreds of CE circles are now seen in a year, are among the best-watched fields in the world. Surely a circle or two could have escaped public notice, but if anything of nearly this scope had occurred before, it could not have so escaped. It only minimizes the importance of the phenomenon to claim it to be nothing new, something I am sure Rutkowksi has no desire to do.

C. Barry Withers
Toronto, Ontario

Chris Rutkowski responds:

C. Barry Withers suggests that my statement that the crop-circle phenomenon is not "new" is misleading. He writes that he believes the recent British circles are a "new" phenomenon and that I "ignore" their true nature. He believes that I erroneously confuse these "new" ground markings with UFO "landing traces" found over the past decades.

I take issue with the suggestion that I am ignoring or misleading in any context. My view that the British crop circles of the 1980s and 1990s are variants of previously documented UGMS (unidentified ground markings) is shared by many researchers. Withers' apparent confusion over the kinds of UGMs found in fields elsewhere than Britain in recent years underlines the problems of British regionalism pervasive in the crop-circle phenomenon. Any listing of UGMs includes a wide variety of kinds of traces, including "burn marks," "tripod marks," "calcification," and so on. Among these are also circular swirled areas within grain fields; these are virtually indistinguishable from the majority of recent British circles. Therefore I think it is proper to state that CE circles (as Withers calls them) *have* been found in fields for many decades.

As for the more unusual "agriglyphs," these do appear to be a previously rare or unheard-of variant which may or may not be part of the UGM gestalt. But it is our understanding that these are the exceptions rather than the rule. Geometric patterns of rings and circles are similarly new *kinds* of UGMs. We must remember that there are (according to some researchers) over 1500 British crop circles, while the statistics from the North American Institute for Crop Circle Research show fewer than 100 traces of all types. The sheer numbers of British cases suggest that something weird is going on in the English countryside and that British crop circles may well *deserve* to be called a "new" phenomenon. But a vast array of evidence points to the conclusion that they are more likely only multiple variants of previously documented UGMs. This does *not* make them any less interesting, and I do *not* minimize the importance of British crop circles. I do recommend some rationality in the evaluation of the British circles, as I would for any other anomalous phenomenon. ■

CUFOS photo exhibit . . .

July 16-21	Arnot Mall 3300 Chambers Road Horseheads, New York
September 6-8	El Con Mall 3601 E. Broadway, Suite 5-B Tucson, Arizona
September 19-22	Central City Mall 295 Central City Mall San Bernardino, California
October 12-13	Omega Conference Holiday Inn North Haven, Connecticut
October 18-20	Camillus Plaza 5300 West Genesee Street Camillus, New York

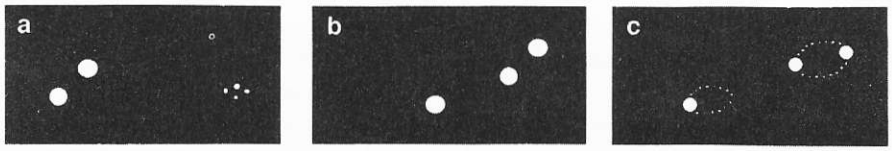

Figure 3

little to the left ahead of them, over a range of mountains. The couple could not see light beams but only two large, luminous, perfectly round disks, surrounded by a light atmospheric halo. The lefthand light was higher than the right.

Mrs. Wengere at first thought the lights must be on transmission towers on the mountaintops, although they would have to have been erected recently since she had never seen them before. There was still enough light in the sky for her to observe that there was nothing between the lights and the range of mountains. She thus deduced that the lights had to be supported by one or two flying-objects whose shape was not discernible. She told her husband, "There's a UFO over there!"

She asked him to stop. He saw the lights and could not explain them either, but he didn't stop because there was no parking space along the road and it would have been dangerous to stop in the dark. The bright lights must have been of excessive dimensions since the stars appeared minuscule and pale in comparison, as did the lights of an approaching aircraft. There was one approaching the UFO (figure 3a) at that very moment. If the lights were at the same distance as the plane, each of them ought to have been almost as large as the plane itself. Mrs. Wengere expected the object to react to the plane, but at that moment she and her husband were passing a village and lost sight of the object. They even had to wait for a red traffic light.

When they once more had a clear view, the lights had disappeared. Mrs. Wengere was annoyed that her husband had not stopped when she had asked him to. He exclaimed, "Look, there they are again!" The lights were hanging a little higher in the sky, above the mountains to the right of the road. The new position and the previous location formed an angle of about 100 degrees. Since the witnesses had not observed the shift, this could have been another object entirely. In fact, they now noted a third light, identical to the first two, a little to the left of the others. It was separated from them by a distance almost 10 times as large as the distance between the other two lights, which were still stationary.

The third light was at first motionless, but after some time it shifted slowly towards the others with a linear uniform speed. It stopped after having covered two-thirds of the distance that separated it from them (figure 3b). The other two lights began to move together, as if they were joined, their diagonal alignment becoming horizontal. The pair became smaller and less intense, but at the same time two chains of red and green lights appeared joining the two. The distance between them grew greater and eventually the two lights disappeared, leaving only the red and green crown of light visible.

The third light also changed during this time. It became fainter and acquired its own oval crown of small red and green lights. The vertical axis of the ellipse thus formed grew gradually longer, but the second crown was smaller than the first (figure 3c). The two witnesses thought that the chains of light were fixed to the sides of objects that were changing their tilt, but neither of them could actually see the objects. Followed by other vehicles, they continued to drive on. Mr. Wengere had slowed down only slightly. The lights were lost once again behind some houses, this time for good.

The Wengeres were already aware of the UFO phenomenon as a result of a previous sighting. On July 20, 1989, at about 6:50 p.m., they had both been out in their garden. The sun was shining and the sky was cloudless. Mrs. Wengere noticed an elongated, silver-grey object. It moved like an aircraft, but she could see neither wings nor tail. It was simply cigar-shaped and completely silent. She pointed it out to her husband, who was equally surprised. Mrs. Wengere thought it so strange that ten minutes later she telephoned the air-traffic control at Zurich-Kloten airport. She learned that there had been no "official flight" at that time over her home and that nothing abnormal had been recorded on the radar screens.

Mrs. Wengere was unable to stop thinking about what she had seen on October 14. She remembered having read about a large number of sightings of UFOs in Belgium. On October 20 she decided to telephone the air-traffic center at Zurich-Kloten. They had seen nothing unusual on their radars during the evening of October 14, and no one else had reported a similar phenomenon. The man who answered the telephone said, "It must be an optical illusion due to some sort of reflection." He said this haughtily, adding that he received many telephone calls of this kind, but that they were almost always optical illusions. This indicates that there were other UFO

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ers seeking proof of survival after death have been taken in by phony mediums who produce other kinds of miraculous effects.

The MJ-12 briefing document represented another kind of high-stakes claim, one touching on a recurring theme in ufology: that at the highest levels of the U.S. government it is known that extraterrestrials are visiting the earth and that actual physical proof of this visitation is being concealed. In this instance, fortunately for those of us who suspect something like this may really be happening, the briefing document does not constitute the beginning and the end of the evidence to that effect. After all, if the Roswell incident occurred as a mass of testimony says it did, there has to be, somewhere, an agency equivalent to "Majestic 12."

The problem for cover-up proponents is that practically nothing is known of this group, if it exists. Let me amend that to "practically nothing we can regard as reliable"; there is no shortage of unreliable or unverifiable claims, many emanating from mysterious "birds," others from charlatans peddling preposterous "UFO secrets" for a hefty price. But of the secret cover-up group we have only two informants (Robert Sarbacher and retired Air Force Gen. Arthur Exon) worth heeding, and both of these were on the outside and knew little.

In the absence of this sort of crucial evidence, the MJ-12 document addresses the desperation of those who have sought a single piece of paper that could be linked to a cover-up group. The document tells us that there is a cover-up, UFOs are extraterrestrial, they have crashed, and certain prominent individuals, all named, directed research and policy-making. It tells ufologists everything they want to know, at least up to November 18, 1952, the date it supposedly was handed to the new President-elect. On top of that, the forger, with a cleverness that borders on the diabolical, tosses in the name of ufology's late arch-foe Donald Menzel, and ufologists get the satisfaction of learning that it was all an act. This psychological master stroke plays directly to those naive souls who can't believe anybody could *really* disbelieve in UFOs; therefore maybe, as long rumor would have it, Phil Klass —Menzel's successor—is a CIA agent after all. The forger knows his ufologists.

There is no "Majestic 12," nor was there ever, it seems safe to say at this late stage of a now mostly moribund controversy. The mystery of the hoaxer's identity and motivation remains, however, and the answer is sure to be an interesting one, if it is ever found. Howard Blum, not necessarily a reliable source, claims that even the FBI couldn't find him. My guess is that the document was part of a disinformation operation run by military intelligence, probably out of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations office at Kirtland Air Force Base, source of other phony "official" UFO documents (one of which actually mentions "Majestic 12"). The purpose may have been to throw investigators off the scent of Roswell. Ufologists' belated recognition of the significance of this event may have constituted the first real threat to official UFO secrecy, and the result was a sophisticated counterintelligence program designed to distract ufologists' attention and to direct their activities elsewhere. (If that was the intention, it was only partially successful; as the newly published books *UFO Crash at Roswell* and *The Roswell Report: A Historical Perspective* attest, the Roswell investigation went on in new and vital directions.) Another possibility is that the document was a ufologist's misguided scheme to see what kind of response he would get from a real cover-up group if he created and circulated a document from a phony group.

Either way, the document, surely the most sophisticated hoax in UFO history, is nearly as mysterious now as it was when we first all heard of it in the spring of 1987. Still, at least one big question has an answer, which is: no, it is not what it wants you to believe it is.

Crash/retrievals remain fertile ground for hoaxes to spring up, and we have not seen the last of them. At the moment one individual is reporting that he saw alien bodies at what he says (though other evidence suggests otherwise) was the second Roswell crash site. Don Schmitt and Kevin Randle, who have investigated his now much-publicized (and ever-changing) story, find a number of good reasons to doubt his testimony. Eventually this story will fade from the scene, to be replaced by other tall tales told by other opportunists to whom the lure of profit or publicity is irresistible. They may be joined by those who have more shadowy motives and who know something about the power of disinformation.

Even as hoaxes afflict ufology, we ufologists need not despair. On the whole we haven't done so badly. True, some have been fooled, but not necessarily because they were foolish; several of ufology's recent hoaxes have been monumentally complex, and in the early stages of their emergence into scrutiny, they sometimes seemed more substantive at first glance than they would at second or third. Not every hoax, after all, is instantly detectable, and it is a regrettable fact that honest witnesses all through UFO history have been unjustly called hoaxers—which ought to give pause to those who otherwise would rush to accuse. Complicated issues are settled through debate and investigation, and if some of the debate has not always been elevated and some of the investigation not entirely competent, some of both was also damned good. Truth-seeking in any field of endeavor is often a messy process. What counts is that at the end of it the facts emerge.

The bad news: there are more hoaxes than ever. The good news: ufology has shown it can take them on. The stakes in current UFO research are higher than ever. If ever there was a time we could afford to be fooled, it is certainly not now.—*Jerome Clark*

Belgian — *continued from page 22*

reports, although the explanation he offered was purely gratuitous.

I note that in the United States a photograph was taken on May 26, 1988, near Southbury of a beautiful crown of alternating red, yellow and green lights against a black background. This is documented by a magnificent slide that I have received from Philip Imbrogno, coauthor of the book *Night Siege*. This shows that one must not treat each case in isolation as if it were unique, but search for correlations as has to be done for any physical phenomenon. For this reason we must not focus our attention solely on the events of March 30-31, 1990, whatever their possible importance may eventually be.

As for the "flying angels effect," which has led to some notable problems in atmospheric physics and useful knowledge for radar operators, this discovery was simply a by-product of rational study of the UFO problem. As such it underlines that it is worthwhile to look carefully at mysterious phenomena. I expect that the thoroughness and seriousness of our study of radar "noise" will help our credibility as we examine other aspects of the UFO phenomenon. ■

Patterns — *continued from page 19*

weather is in January and February.

This shift in peaks and troughs was always confounding, and in addition to throwing a wrench into a skeptical explanation, ufologists were at a loss to explain it as well. This more recent analysis once again found a summer peak and a winter trough, though this time the summer peak seemed to have shifted to July. But it was remembered that a large number of reports in the MANUFO-CAT file came from the 1975 wave which had occurred in the summer.

As an experiment the 1975 and 1976 reports were subtracted from the file. This time the analysis showed *no* monthly variation in numbers of UFO reports. The proposed interpretation of this is that in general the number of UFO sightings is constant for any given area. It would be interesting to test this theory, using other data. What this really means is a matter that could be debated foryears.

These are just some of the results that can be achieved on a low-power computing system and a lot of hard work. Are these results useful? Certainly the global impact is minimal, and we are no closer to identifying the nature of the UFO unknowns. But as has been pointed out by others, such computer analyses of UFO data should be performed and compared with other results worldwide. The result may be a better understanding of perceptual psychology. We may better understand observations of natural phenomena. And ufologists may get a deeper understanding of the UFO phenomenon they are dealing with. ■

Crop circles — *continued from page 16*

My second point concerns the often-expressed view that "whirlwinds" cannot create circles because whirlwinds move and circles are clearly formed by something that isn't moving. Forget for the moment that nobody is suggesting simple whirlwinds or tornadoes are to blame—but a rare and specific type of vortex, akin to both these things but also very different. Read the eyewitness testimony gathered in the past couple of years, and you immediately see something important.

Take a case from Blyth in Northumberland in September 1990 when two persons observed two circles a few yards aprt under formation. They report a swirling column of air crossing a field, lightly brushing the tops of the crop, producing no damage and being largely invisible. Had they not been so close to see the air and its effects fleshed out by loose debris swirled around, the phenomenon probably would not have been spotted. Then this "force" descended very briefly and as it did so remained stationary for a few seconds. At this crucial stage the circle was formed. The vortex (if we accept this is what the witnesses describe—which seems to me more probable than an invisible spaceship) then began to rise again and moved laterally above the crops but at too great a height to leave a damage trail. Some way along the field it descended once more, was constrained into a static position, gouged out the circle, and dissipated upwards.

Think of a corkscrew sliding along the top of a piece of wood gently enough to leave almost no scratch. Then push harder downwards and rotate. A hole is formed. The wood resists lateral motion, so in order to continue moving sideways across the plane, you would raise the corkscrew a little and glide it across the surface again before pressing down at a second location and producing another hole. The analogy seems quite apt.

This is one of a number of things the eyewitness testimony is teaching us about the mechanics of crop-circle formation. At least teaching those of us bothering to listen to it.

The circles *are* the result of a moving vortex but are left when the vortex temporarily ceases its lateral motion and moves downwards for a brief period. This is one reason why formations of several circles in close proximity are not uncommon. They result from one event's moving across a field at a height where ground damage is rarely (but still occasionally) left.

Those of us who favor the vortex theory came to this particular conclusion from a deep familiarity with the evidence. After having spent a decade following this subject, I would gladly embrace any theory that adequately explained the data. So far only the vortex fills the bill. ■